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With the exception of the United States, there is not a single one of the great powers which does not maintain a highly paid corps of female diplomatic agents in addition to its regular staff of ambassadors, envoys, secretaries and attaches. Although not officially accredited



MME. DE NOVIKOFF.

ited as such to the various courts and governments which they are destined to influence, the services of these petticoated diplomats are rated by the sovereigns and ministers of foreign affairs who employ them as being of infinitely superior value to those of their male colleagues.

Paid out of the secret service fund which is at the disposal of every European chancery, their names do not appear on any of the published civil service lists, and are only known with any degree of certainty by a favored few. It is they, however, and not the ambassadors, who are intimately with all the most delicate and important negotiations; their reports and recommendations command a far greater degree of attention and consideration on the part of their governments than those of the publicly accredited attaches and envoys, and whereas the latter are but the ornamental figures of the diplomatic representation, it is these ladies of the secret service who are the mainpring and prime mover of every international intrigue.

This will hardly give rise to much surprise, for one of the principal features of diplomacy is to lead clever and astute persons into believing things which are untrue. Women are much more suited for this task than men. The talent for intrigue, which is only acquired by men after years of labor and experience, seems to be innate in the female character, where it frequently seems to the eminence of genius. Women possess, too, a delicate tact and intuition for which one can search fruitlessly in men. Their powers of persuasion are incomparably superior, as well as of a more multiple nature, than those of the sex which is only physically, but, alas! not mentally, the stronger; and in difficult situations, whence a man could only emerge with the help of a lie of coarse and discernible texture, the woman will escape under the cover of a most artistic piece of intricate embroidery on the very floral and most diaphanous groundwork of fact.

Some of these female diplomatic agents are, or have been, celebrated for their beauty and some for their ugliness. Curiously enough, Russia, which employs a larger corps of them than any other nation, ordinarily recruits them among ladies whose charms, to put the matter mildly, are more of a mental than physical character. The celebrated Princess de Lieven had no pretensions to beauty, but on the contrary several personal defects. This, however, did not prevent her from wielding an influence of almost incalculable extent and pre-eminence over the successive administrations of Great Britain during close upon five and thirty years.

Lord Palmerston, Lord John Russell, Lord Grey, Lord Aberdeen and the Duke of Wellington, each one of them in turn



THE RUSSIAN PRINCESS.

figured in the ranks of her most devoted admirers, and sought her advice both in office and out. It was that of their Egeria, Princess Lieven, who for nearly a quarter of a century wielded a similar power in Russia, and who reigned supreme over the passions and politics of St. Petersburg. Absolutely homely, with her flat Kalashnikov nose, large mouth and small eyes, she, de Novikoff, too, who since 1875 has been a point of spending at least six millions of each year in London in the interests of the czar's government, is the reverse of beautiful. What she lacks in good looks, however, she makes up in cleverness, and it is, thanks to her efforts alone, that a powerful politico-Russian party has been formed in England, a party which includes such names as Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Asquith, Mr. Labouchere and most of the other Liberal leaders, besides the principal proprietors

of The Daily News and The Pall Mall Gazette.

Mme. de Novikoff is the sister-in-law of the late Russian ambassador at Vienna and the daughter of the well known Gen. de Kireff, of Moscow. Most of her letters to The Times and Daily News bear the signature of "O. K.," which stands for Olga de Kireff. Her headquarters in London are at Claridge's hotel, where her salons are thronged every afternoon and evening throughout the parliamentary season with influential men of all parties. She is a frequent and favorite guest at Mr. Gladstone's table, and it was mainly owing to her influence over him that England abstained from going to war with Russia in behalf of the Turks in 1877. At the present moment she is as usual at her post, devoting her energies to proving to the English people that the stories about the persecution of the Jews in Russia are all lies, that there is no such thing as the exile of political prisoners to Siberia and that the Nihilists are unworthy of British sympathy.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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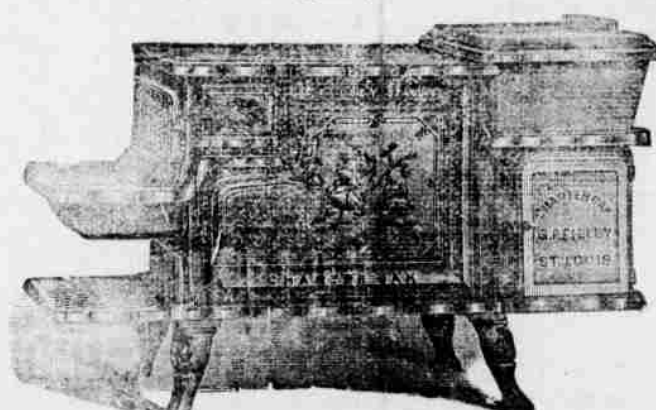
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